

STATE LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET

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BICYCLE HELMET USE LAWS

The United States Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) supports the enactment of bicycle helmet usage laws. Bicycle helmets offer bicyclists the best protection from head injuries resulting from bicycle crashes, and bicycle helmet laws have been proven effective in increasing bicycle helmet use.

Key Facts

- More than 45,000 bicyclists have died in traffic crashes in the United States since 1932—the first year that bicycle fatality estimates were recorded.
- In 1998, 761 bicyclists were killed, and approximately 53,000 were injured in traffic-related crashes. Children ages 14 and under accounted for 212 (28%) of these fatalities, making this one of the most frequent causes of injury-related death for young children.
- Each year almost 400,000 children ages 14 and under are treated in emergency rooms for bicycle-related injuries.
- Universal bicycle helmet use by children ages 4 to 15 would prevent 39,000 to 45,000 head injuries, and 18,000 to 55,000 scalp and face injuries annually.
- Bicycle helmets are 85-88 percent effective in mitigating head and brain injuries, making the use of helmets the single most effective way to reduce head injuries and fatalities resulting from bicycle crashes.
- Despite the fact that 70 to 80 percent of all fatal bicycle crashes involve head injuries, only about 20-25 percent of all bicyclists wear bicycle helmets.
- Nationally, bicyclists ages 14 and under are at five times greater risk for injury than older cyclists.
- As with safety belts, child safety seats, and motorcycle helmets, the enactment of laws requiring the use of bicycle helmets—along with education and visible enforcement—is likely to be the most promising way to increase bicycle helmet usage.

Legislative Status

- The first bicycle helmet law was passed in California in 1986. This law was amended in 1993 to cover all children under age 18.
- As of January 2000, 16 states have enacted age-specific bicycle helmet laws. Most of these laws cover bicyclists under age 16.
- H.R. 965, the Child Safety Protection Act of 1994, required the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to develop a mandatory bicycle helmet standard.
- An interim mandatory bicycle helmet standard became effective March 17, 1995. Helmets were required to meet one of the following voluntary standards: ANSI, ASTM, Snell, or Canadian (CSA).



U.S. Department of Transportation
**National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration**

NHTSA
People Saving People
www.nhtsa.dot.gov

Legislative Status (continued)

■ On March 10, 1998, the CPSC published 16 CFR Part 1203, Safety Standard for Bicycle Helmets. Which applies to bicycle helmets manufactured after March 10, 1999. The standard mandates several performance requirements including:

- **Impact protection in a crash:** The standard establishes a performance test to ensure that helmets will adequately protect the head in a collision or fall.
- **Children's helmets and head coverage:** The standard specifies an increased area head coverage for children ages 1 to 5.
- **Chin strap strength and stability:** The standard establishes a performance test to measure chin strap strength to prevent breakage or excessive elongation, and the helmet's resistance to rolling off the head during a collision or fall.

In addition, helmets meeting the new standard must have a label indicating that they meet CPSC's safety standard.

Cost Savings

- The estimated cost of bicycle-related injuries and deaths (for all ages) is \$8 billion.
- It is expensive to treat bicycle-related head injuries because these injuries can endure throughout a lifetime.
- Every \$10 bike helmet saves this country \$30 in direct health costs, and an additional \$365 in societal costs. If 85 percent of all child bicyclists wore helmets every time they rode a bicycle for a year, the lifetime medical cost savings would total \$109 to \$142 million.

Information Sources

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"Mandatory Bicycle Helmet Use: The Victorian Experience." Vulcan, A.P., M.H. Cameron, and M.H. Watson, *World Journal of Surgery*, 1992.

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Injury Control Recommendations: Bicycle Helmets. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1995.

Mandatory Helmet Laws: A Summary. Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute, BHSI web page: www.helmets.org, 1997.

BICYCLE HELMET LAWS: A SUMMARY*

Jurisdiction	Ages/Conditions	Jurisdiction	Ages/Conditions
New Jersey	Under 14	Pennsylvania	Under 12
Georgia	Under 16	Alabama	Under 16
Connecticut	Under 15	Maryland	Under 16
Oregon	Under 16	Delaware	Under 16
Tennessee	Under 12	West Virginia	Under 15
New York	Under 14	Rhode Island	Under 16
California	Under 18	Florida	Under 16
Massachusetts	Under 13	Maine	Under 16

Source: BHSI

*Check with your state bicycle and pedestrian coordinators for county, city, and local bicycle helmet laws.

The reports and additional information are available from your State Highway Safety Office, the NHTSA Regional Office serving your State, or from NHTSA Headquarters, Traffic Safety Programs, ATTN: NTS-15, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590; 202-366-1739.